2:Man G-5 (1869-1880)1932 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

possible are required before we can speak with certainty regarding the extent, limits, and conditions of heredity among this race; but it has been noticed that, as a general rule, they have excellent memories, especially on those subjects in which the intellects of their ancestors have been consciously or unconsciously exercised or cultivated in the savage state. The following passage will afford an illustration of the intelligence displayed by these people on such subjects. It is taken from the late Mr. Kurz's Report on the Vegetation of the Andaman Islands:—

"While I was in the Andamans I was in the habit of consulting people (convicts) from the most different parts of India for the native names of the plants. As a general result, I may state that the Burmans were best acquainted with the flora of the Andamans, but they are by no means equal to the Andamanese in accuracy and certainty of determination. While the Burmans were obliged continually to cut into the bark to recognise the trees, the Andamanese readily gave their names, and I could rely upon their statements, which was not the case at all with those of the Burmese."

16. Instances have been observed among them of individuals possessing strong wills and vivid powers of imagination: as a race they do not appear to be subject to trances, illusions, or somnambulism, but, like many other savages, they place implicit faith in dreams, shaping their conduct in superstitious conformity to the warning or advice supposed to have been conveyed therein.

Magic and Witchcraft.—1. There are, however, certain individuals in these tribes, known as *ôko-pai'ad-* (*lit.*, a dreamer), who are credited with the possession of supernatural powers—such as second sight, expressed by the term *àramū'ga-tâ'rabanga-*, —and of a mysterious influence over the fortunes and lives of their neighbours. It is thought that they can bring trouble, sickness, and death upon those who fail to evince their belief in them in some substantial form;[1] they thus generally manage to obtain the best of everything, for it is considered foolhardy to deny them, and they do not scruple to ask for any article to which they may take a fancy.

2. These quasi-seers are invariably of the male sex, and it sometimes even happens that a young boy is looked upon as a "coming" *ôko-pai'ad-*, their position being generally in the first instance attained by relating an extraordinary dream, the details

[1] This reminds one somewhat of the disease makers of Tanna (New Hebrides), who are supposed to cause disease and death by burning *nahak* (rubbish, principally refuse of food), and who are propitiated by continual presents. The practice of burning beeswax, in order to cause annoyance to an enemy, will be mentioned under "Superstitions," paragraph 13.

6: Cipriani E-5 (1951-1953)1961 AZ2 Andamans AZ2
Onge

Endogamous life, or the habit of never washing even the female genital organs, cannot be the only cause of Andamanese sterility. Alcohol and venereal diseases such as syphilis may only be a complementary cause. The Onge's limited fertility probably derives from other factors besides their protracted and inceasingly strict endogamy.

We can only remark that Onge women rarely become pregnant before 28 ; their fertility ceases around the age of 48. The high rate of sterility among Onge women after marriage (which generally takes place at the age of 14) is puzzling indeed. Of several childless couples that I studied in Little Andaman, the woman was under 28. There is hope of fertility after that age. It could so happen, for instance, in the case of two young Onge chiefs, Okkeggi and Chendubai, married to two sisters among the most beautiful and flourishing girls on the island : Ooaghēghē and Tocooaghēghē, both around 20. They never became pregnant, although menstruation was normal and they had plenty of sexual intercourse, even extra-marital.

The delayed appearance of fertility in Andamanese women is probably connected with a general biological condition fostered by unhygienic habits. For instance : young Onge females have a high vagina acidity content that is certainly harmful to spermatozoa. It decreases with age, facilitating, we may suppose, fecundation. Vaginal washing would help, but the Onge women never recur to it. But this is only one side of the question. It is evidently urgent to do whatever is necessary to save the Onge from extinction. We must remember that civilized nations, through international agreements, are anxious to protect plant and animal species from disappearance. The same should be done for man, and equivalent international laws are needed. The Onge as a human group are on the verge of extinction ; but they still retain enough vitality to be rescued before they finally vanish into eternity.

Without enlarging here on the disorders of Onge sexual life and their dire effects also on the number of births, I wish to point out one more fact : Onge homosexuality as a normal occurrence. It is a plague in Little Andaman, helped by the regular physiological functions of both extremities of the digestive tube. The sexual tendencies that prevail in Little Andaman are a strong criticism of FREUD's theories on sexual life, but I will not discuss this here. I would rather say a few words about some opinions regarding the cause of Onge sterility that I heard expressed in the Andamans. Foreigners there ascribe it to the *naquinēghē* – the grass-like apron worn by women. Colonists believe that this garment leads to copulation from the rear, reducing the chances of fecundation. This idea is incorrect : the Onge never do this because the *naquinēghē* can be easily lifted as required, and pulled up over the abdomen. It is true that Onge women remove the *naquinēghē* only to replace it with a fresh one ; they wear it even when sleeping. Not for a single instant must women remain "undressed", for superstitious reasons. When a new *naquinēghē* is needed, the old one is furtively disposed of. Husband and wife repair secretely to a remote part of the forest, the woman slipping the new garment over her head before removing the old one, and burying the latter, which is quickly destroyed by white ants. The Onge believe that possession by a stranger of a worn

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291 754 *naquinĕghĕ* exposes the former owner to harm. Ill-disposed persons could use it for black magic practices. I collected specimens of this garment, all of them, however, brand-new – for the above-mentioned reason. To avoid trouble to the owner, nobody is allowed to touch the *naquinĕghĕ*, which is worn in front of the vulva. To touch it is a deadly offence. Aside from the *naquinĕghĕ*, Andaman 842 colonists attribute the natives' sterility to their abhorrence of salt. Another 263 opinion would have it that the lack of salt transforms human saliva into poison: the Jarawas, by spitting on their arrows render them poisonous. The absurdity of this belief is so evident that it requires no confutation. The Onge refuse to eat salt because they consider it unhealthy, or, to say the least, disgusting.

III. Illnesses and Onge Curative Methods

164 Few illnesses affect the Onge, but they succumb to those few with surprising speed. Often they become seriously ill for mysterious reasons and in spite of their robust appearance. Smallpox, tuberculosis and poliomyelitis are unknown in Little Andaman, although they sometimes strike in the nearby Nicobars. Measles broke out on the island on more than one occasion, killing off all the inhabitants of several communal huts, which I later found deserted and in ruins. With regard to syphilis, the Indian Census of 1931 quotes an old remark of PORTMAN's concerning a few individuals considered by him as infected. This was later denied.

Onge women are more resistant to illness than men. Wounds heal promptly [752] in both sexes, without the aid of remedies. A few of the older men, however, [123] had suppurating sores on their legs, slow to disappear even when disinfected and treated by me with European medicines. No similar sores were found on women. On the other hand, women suffer more than men from ringworm, mainly in the umbilical region. Nothing is done to rid them of it because the discomfort is slight. I suggested an Indian cure made with the leaves of the neem tree, or Melia azedarach, very common in Southern Asia [123] where it is considered sacred. I imported the plant to Little Andaman, but the Onge displayed no interest in it. I found a single instance of leucoderma, in a woman with whitish spots on her hands and lips. I could get no reliable information about the incidence of cancer, but it appears to be rare on the island. No baldness is to be seen in Little Andaman, and I found few traces of [142] greying hair, as the Onge die young. A transversal bregmatic furrow is noticeable [482] in all individuals, male and female, as a consequence of carrying loads hung from their heads by a strip of bark. The Onge start doing this in childhood. An artificial, unintentional deformation of the skull is the result of that uncomfortable habit.

751 For hygienic reasons the Little Andaman aborigines paint their bodies with 302 refined clay and ochre of various shades, mainly reddish. This gives the women [386] occasion to embellish the bodies of their husbands with an endless variety of geometrical designs. Every year I found changes in their patterns, and I

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no specialized physicians, the Onge do not understand that payment can be exacted for medical care. This stems from the fact that wages are not considered by those happy people as payment for any kind of work whatsoever, but only as a gift. I realized this when I tried to pay my guides after our extenuating marches through the jungle : in order to avoid offending the natives that we had casually met in the course of our trip, I had to give equal reward to everybody.

The Onge consider some men or women better endowed than others with anti-malefic influence ; but these too neither demand nor receive wages for their services. Evil spirits or evil persons are believed to be principally responsible for illness. A series of superstitions and remarkable habits derive from this belief. The above-mentioned precautions concerning the *naquinèghé* are among them. For identical reasons they carefully hide hair cuttings, but not nail parings, for the simple reason that nails are never cut but worn down by digging for edible roots, fishing, and other rough work. Superstition, as we know, is also the reason for painting the body to prevent fever and other ills.

In the depths of their jungle the Onge appear to practice some kind of witchcraft. On several occasions I noticed the mysterious behaviour of some natives travelling with me. Occasionally a man left our marching column to examine the inside of a huge hollow tree and signal to his friends. They did not prevent me from looking into the hollow, where I saw only a simple structure of short sticks resembling a trap without being one. The Onge do not use traps ; moreover, those structures were far too flimsy to catch anything. Often, two or three men assembled in consultation, rearranged the sticks that had probably been dislodged by the passage of lizards, crabs or other small animals, and walked away silently. I could get no explanation on the matter. Certainly the Onge are sagacious observers of animal and vegetable life and have deep knowledge of their hidden properties. Some trees are probably used for magical purposes, but, I insist, it is impossible as yet to affirm it. The structures in question consisted of four vertical sticks, about 30 cms long, joined at the top by four more sticks of approximately the same length, placed horizontally. The result was a box-like frame, loose and unsecured. The slightest disturbance, such as a light breeze, could destroy the flimsy construction. As far as I could guess they invested those structures with curative properties, but in what manner remains a mystery. I noticed analogous practices among Central African Pygmies and other primitives.

It is very clear that the Onge dread illness and magic spells, for they consider themselves at a loss in fighting such evils. Unhygienic habits are of no importance to them.

Resting is considered favorable to good health. The Onge indulge voluptuously in rest, interrupting it, however, with too frequent sexual excursions. They mainly rest from doing nothing, because 90 % of their time is spent in what, for them, is the most agreeable manner of enjoying life.

In mid-March, when the honey harvest reaches its peak, the Onge guzzle